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FEEDING PUPPIES

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In the feeding of young dogs, the ration immediately following the weaning period, which usually occurs at 6 weeks of age, should contain some liquid, some solid, and some semi-solid feeds. The transition from liquid feed, which the puppy obtains while nursing its dam, to a semi-solid or solid ration should be a gradual process and should be begun when the animal is approximately 4 weeks old. At that time the puppy should be given daily a small amount of ground, shredded, or well-minced lean meat, and it should be encouraged to eat some dry bread, puppy or dog biscuits, or shredded wheat moistened with milk, meat broth, or non-greasy gravies. A puppy that has been taught to eat such things before weaning will not be greatly affected by the separation from its mother at weaning time and should not go "off feed."

When feeding a young dog that has just been weaned, it is necessary to give a little feed at a time and to feed the animal frequently. For a month or so after weaning, a puppy should be fed at least 6 times a day. The number of daily feedings may then be reduced as the animal ages, while the amount of feed given at each meal should be gradually increased. When young dogs reach the age of one year they may be fed once, twice, or three times daily, depending upon the requirements of the dogs and the desires of the owner.

For the weaned puppy a ration of: Well-minced, ground, or shredded lean beef, lamb, or mutton, slightly seasoned with salt; some vegetables of a non-starchy nature; meat substitutes, such as whole cow's milk, eggs, boned fish or salmon; and some cereal grains or products thereof is suggested. All these things are not used at each feeding, of course, but the day's ration should include considerable variety. As a guide to compounding the ration of a dog receiving moderate exercise, a mixture of 50 percent meat or its substitutes, 25 percent vegetables, and 25 percent cereal grains or products thereof has often proved satisfactory. Necessary feeding changes may be made after results have been observed.

Meat may be given to the puppy either raw or cooked, or its use can be varied from time to time. The best ways to cook meat are to boil or broil it. When a proper selection of meat is available, the lean cuts from the cheaper parts of the carcass, such as the chuck and neck pieces, are generally the most economical to use. A good way to feed eggs is to mix them raw with milk. When feeding meat, or in fact food of any kind, be sure that it is of good quality and entirely wholesome. Spoiled and moldy feed must never be given to dogs, for its use may cause either serious digestive disturbances or death.

The inclusion of some vegetable material in the puppy diet is usually essential and advisable. Vegetables provide necessary bulk, act as body regulators, and are valuable sources of vitamins and minerals. The vegetables most commonly used for dog feeding are tomatoes, beets, carrots, onions, cabbage, peas, and beans. Some of these are tolerated by some dogs and refused by others, so care should be taken to use only those which agree with the puppies. Of the vegetables listed, perhaps tomatoes and beets will be found most useful. Usually puppies should not be fed peas and beans, because they are hard to digest. In all instances the use of potatoes should be avoided, because of their very high starch content. Vegetables may be fed in either the raw or cooked form, but inasmuch as they are not generally liked it frequently is necessary either to chop them fine and mix them thoroughly with the meat, or to grind or cook them with meat to prevent the dog from nosing them out of the food and eating only the meat.

Dry bread, puppy or dog biscuits, and shredded wheat biscuits can be used for the cereal portion of the ration. With the young puppy it is usually advisable to break the bread or biscuits into relatively small pieces and to moisten such food with meat broth, gravy, milk, or even water. Do not feed the food in a sloppy condition, however. Wheat bread is usually the easiest to obtain and it is the kind fed most often. In feeding bread, especial care should be taken to see that it is neither moldy nor mildewed. If desired, the puppy or dog biscuits can be purchased in the broken form, either as a "meal" or as "kibbled" biscuit.

The quantity of feed which any dog will require depends largely upon its size, condition, individuality, and age, the environment and climate, and the amount of exercise or work it receives. Because these things are so variable, the owner or caretaker can best determine the correct quantity to give. In feeding a young dog, it is usually better to keep the animal just a trifle hungry than to allow it to gorge itself at any one meal and to refuse food at the next feeding period. It is necessary, of course, always to feed enough to keep the puppy in a thrifty, growing condition.

All feeding utensils should be kept thoroughly clean, and any uneaten food should be removed as soon as the puppy has satisfied its appetite. Observance of these points in management will help greatly in keeping the youngsters "on feed" and ready and eager for the next meal. A good supply of fresh, clean, cool water is always essential to proper growth and good health. Regularity of feeding is also a necessary part of good management. Where more than one puppy is fed, it is a good idea to provide individual dishes or pans to prevent the stronger dogs' robbing the weaker ones of food. And at feeding time it is wise to allow the dogs to eat their meals without undue interference or disturbance, otherwise animals with surly or vicious dispositions may be developed.

In addition to the regular feed given a puppy, many dog owners have found it advisable to include a small amount of cod-liver oil in the daily ration. To start, only a few drops should be given, and the amount then increased gradually up to one or more teaspoons or table-spoons daily, depending on the size and needs of the animal. The cod-liver oil may be mixed with the food, as this simplifies feeding.

The advisability of feeding bones to puppies regularly is a debatable matter. There is perhaps no great harm in allowing dogs occasionally to gnaw the meat from large bones which will not splinter, as this facilitates digestion and helps in teething. There is no need, however, to allow bones to lie about after the dog has removed the meat. They frequently cause broken teeth and fights. The feeding of bones of a sharp or splintery nature, such as those from fish and poultry, should always be avoided, because they may either lodge in the throat or puncture the digestive organs and cause serious injuries or death.

If the dog is not in a thrifty condition, it is advisable to examine the droppings to see whether or not it is infested with worms. It may also be bothered with other internal or external parasites. When worms are known to be present, it is necessary to give prompt treatment for them. Treatment of some internal and external parasites and parasitic diseases require the services of a qualified veterinarian. *

* For information on the various parasites and parasitic diseases of dogs, consult U. S. Department of Agriculture Circular 338, "Parasites and Parasitic Diseases of Dogs."

